

CHAPTER 9

SOME BILATERAL ELEMENTS IN ANLO KINSHIP

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Although the social structure of the Anlo is based on an essentially patrilineal ideology, in practice a number of bilateral elements are found in the various areas of the social system. Moreover several institutions found in the more publicised patrilineal societies are either totally absent or practised on a substantially reduced scale. Such practices as the levirate, woman marriage, sororal polygyny and the transfer of rights in genetricem are totally absent.¹ In this paper an attempt is made to describe both the idealised patrilineal system and the institutions and practices which highlight the bilateral elements. We will then consider some of the other ways in which the system differs from the better known patrilineal societies.

The Anlo, who number about 250,000, are the most numerous of the Ewe-speaking people and occupy an area of about 880 square miles in the extreme south eastern corner of Ghana immediately east of the Volta River. The landscape of their country is dominated by the large Keta lagoon which occupies the southern half of the country, about a third of the total area, and by the numerous streams and creeks which join this lagoon with the Volta River. Today the Anlo pursue both sea and lagoon fishing in addition to farming of maize, cassava and several kinds of vegetables.

The key to understanding Anlo social organisation is patrilineal descent which is based on clanship and lineage organisation. There are at least fifteen clans around which the society is organised. As in many clan - based societies, the number of the clans is sometimes subject to argument. In certain parts of northern and eastern Anlo there are descent groups which are not generally accorded clan status though they sometimes claim to be independent of the main clans. The late Professor Westermann², who with Spieth³ did pioneering work among the Ewe, explained in his Die

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Glidvi - Ewe that the conflicting statements as to the number of Anlo clans is due to the recognition sometimes of these groups as separate clans. He further explained that these groups, due to their numerical weakness in the past, placed themselves under the protection of others and therefore lost their independence. The structure and organisation of these accessory groups are quite different from the clans. In any case they are not recognised officially at Anloga the traditional capital as clans.⁴

The Anlo term for clan is hlo. This may be defined as a group of people who are believed to have descended patrilineally from a common putative ancestor and who share the same totemic and other observances. Clan membership is obtained by birth, but strangers and slaves were sometimes incorporated into the clans of their masters and were accorded almost full membership status, except that today when their foreign origins are remembered they are refused succession rights. Strangers who were not specifically attached to any particular Anlo were grouped into one special clan created for strangers only. The descendants of this special strangers clan are known today as the Blu clan. The composition of this Blu clan is quite unique in clan organisation, for although recruitment into it has been and still is based on patri-filiation, those who originally composed it did not have any common patrilineal ties. The only thing they had in common was their foreign origin. As such the definition of the clan as a group of agnates tracing patrilineal descent from a common ancestor does not apply to the Blu.

All the fifteen clans are dispersed throughout the entire Anlo country in such a way that every large settlement has a branch of most of the clans living in it. Although it is a dispersed group the clan has many characteristics of corporateness. Land, palm groves and creeks are owned by clans. They have appointed leaders in whom are vested legal and ritual powers. They also meet occasionally to discuss matters of common interest. All the clans except the yetsofe have their ancestral shrines at Anloga, the traditional capital, where every year clansmen from all over the tribe make pilgrimages. In the past, these pilgrimages were made for specific ritual and ceremonial purposes.

Apart from the usual offerings and prayers, children were brought to the shrine to be washed in the aghametsi the clan's ritual water and inducted in to full membership of the clan cult. It was also during these pilgrimages that facial marks were made. Today though prayers are offered during these visits, they are more of sight-seeing excursions than religious pilgrimages. The yetsofe have their ritual centre at Tsiamé about ten miles north of Anloga. In the past vengeance was effected through the clan. An offender would have his clansmen taken or killed if he ran away or somehow evaded the punishment applicable to the offence committed. Likewise an offended party was entitled to help from his fellow clansmen.

There are no aristocratic clans in Anlo. All are equal in status but perform different functions to the settlements and the tribe. The Paramount stool belongs to the Adzovia and the Bate clans who alternately provide the king; the Lafe are the king makers; and the Lafe together with the Amlade are the hereditary priests in each settlement and at the national level, while the Dzevi are the chief priests for the war god, Nyigbla. But in each settlement the clan dominant in terms of numbers or which was the first to settle there provides the chief.

Membership of a clan carries many social attributes which distinguish members of one from the other. Some of these are names, food taboos, avoidances, injunctions and the possession of a clan cult. For instance every clan has a pair of names, one for men and the other for women. Each has its own totems which are associated with stories about the clan and its origin or some exploit of the founding ancestor. A clan also has its own funeral rites.

Membership of a particular clan is believed to imply certain personal qualities. A particular clan may be spoken of as being addicted to certain practices or as being notably wicked, even-tempered, violent or fertile. The point being that these qualities are imputed not to a particular group of agnates but to all the members of the clan.

The Anlo clan is not exogamous. In fact in the

past, and today in some remote village, marriages are encouraged between clan folk between whom genealogies could not be traced, but there was no rule of clan endogamy.

The relation between clansmen is characterised by friendliness and mutual help in general terms. Of great importance from the individual standpoint is perhaps the help a man may receive from clansmen outside his own settlement. An Anlo traveller stranded in any part of Anlo country would only have to trace his fellow clansmen in that locality and be assured of the utmost hospitality. This is based on the belief that members of the same clan, wherever they might be living, have a common patrilineal ancestor a long time ago though the geneological links joining them may be unknown. It is the recognition of this belief that keeps clansmen together and makes mutual help amongst them an integral part of their relationship. In this way clanship provides for the application of kinship categories over a social field much more extensive than known or putative kinship of other categories.

All the large settlements have segments of the clans living in them. The members of these local segments of the clan, who trace common descent from a known ancestor, form what we may call the lineage. There are in some settlements more than one lineage of the same clan. Unlike the clan, the word lineage does not seem to have any exact Ewe equivalent. This is probably because the Anlo themselves are not always definite about it and refer to it rather loosely with various terms. Some authorities⁵ including Westermann, Barbara Ward, Manoukian and Fiawoo have suggested the term fome. But the term fome is unacceptable because it is a more inclusive term and certainly has many bilateral connotations. When however it is necessary for the Anlo to distinguish the lineage from the kin groups with bilateral connotations the term afedo is commonly used. For instance the lineage ancestors are called afedo - me - nɔliwo as opposed to tɔgbenɔliwo the ancestors in general; the ancestral rites are called afedo-nu; and the lineage members are called afedo deka-me tɔwo. Afedo therefore seems to be the most appropriate Ewe equivalent of the Anlo

lineage.

The Afedo may be defined as that branch of a clan found in a settlement which comprises all those persons, male and female, who are able to trace relationship by a series of genealogical steps through the male line to a known ancestor and theoretically to each other. It is an exogamous group of nearly eight to ten generations. It is named after its founding ancestor and has as symbols of interest and unity a stool (zikpui), an ancestral shrine, a lineage cult, a lineage head and common property.

Within the lineage members are entitled to a number of rights and privileges. By his membership every man has a plot of land to cultivate, a creek to fish in, place to live and a group to care for him in time of difficulty. With these rights and privileges go duties and obligations such as helping needy members, working towards the maintenance of the good name of the lineage, the promotion of its unity, reverence to the wishes of the lineal ancestors and obedience to the lineage head and other older members.

The lineage head was usually its oldest male member of the oldest living generation, and the older he was the greater his ritual powers. Today however the office is elective and therefore younger members with qualities of leadership may be preferred to older men. He administers the lineage and other property, and no transaction concerning this or other lineage interests may take place without his knowledge. He judges disputes involving members of the lineage and is the group's representative on the village's governing council. He is normally consulted about any major undertaking in an individual member's life such as marriage. He is also the chief priest of the lineage, and is regarded in this capacity to be the link between the living and the dead, and the only one who could speak with sufficient authority to the understanding of the ancestors. All offerings made to them are presented by him on behalf of his people.

Marriage among the Anlo is usually virilocal and therefore a lineage is almost always confined to a section of the town although some may be living with their maternal relatives elsewhere in the town.

These in brief are the main features of Anlo descent groups. On the surface they present a picture of a straight forward patrilineal society, which indeed it is. But a number of practices and observances show that there can be a lot of difference between a theoretical structure and observable practice. This last point is crucial in the light of the literature we have had so far on African patrilineal societies which, with the possible exception of the Tallensi,⁶ Lugbara⁷ and a few others, tend to over-emphasize the importance of descent groups. In view of this, it is intended as a first step to make a few observations on patrilineal societies in general, in order to bring out the similarities and differences between the Anlo and some of the better known patrilineal societies of Africa.

The literature on these African societies suggests that associated with agnatic lineages are institutions and practices which are directly or indirectly concerned with the continuity and strength of the agnatic group. These are mostly rules of marriage and the filiation of children. The first practice that comes to mind is that marriage in these societies transfers what Bohannan calls rights in genetricem, by which is meant that by the payment of bridewealth the bridegroom acquires rights over the reproductive services of the woman. That is after the marriage all children born to the woman, regardless of their biological fatherhood, will be counted as the children of the man who paid bridewealth for the woman. This practice has the effect of:

- (i) making divorce difficult and
- (ii) ensuring that enough men are recruited into the agnatic group

Since marriage transfers absolutely the reproductive services of the woman, steps are taken to retain these rights in the agnatic lineage after the death of the husband. Usually a pro-husband from the lineage of the deceased husband succeeds him under the institutions of the levirate and widow inheritance. Evans Pritchard differentiates between widow inheritance and the true levirate.⁸ In the true levirate children born to the woman after the husband's death are regarded as the dead man's and not the pro-husband's. In widow inheritance the inheritor actually re-marries the widow and

is the pater of the children born to the widow. There is also among these patrilineal societies what Evans-Pritchard calls "ghost marriage". That is the practice by which a kinsman takes a wife to the name of a man who died without legal male heirs. The idea is that children of this marriage will be counted as belonging to the dead man. Also in most of these societies a barren woman would marry another woman and hire a kinsman to sleep with this woman-wife, so as to raise children to the name of the barren woman. Associated with this practice is that of an impotent man hiring a kinsman to sleep with his wife to produce children for the impotent man. In most of these societies the marital status of the mother determines the status, the legitimacy or otherwise of her children. Hence Evans-Pritchard's famous statement, "the principle of agnatic descent is by a kind of paradox traced through the mother". Indeed a more appropriate statement cannot epitomise the institutions of these societies.

The primary aim of marriage in African societies is the raising of a family. If therefore a woman fails to produce children it is obligatory in these patrilineal societies for the lineage of the barren wife to supply another wife usually a sister for the husband. This institution of the sororate usually goes with sororal polygyny, whereby preference is given to marriage of sisters to the same man whether or not the first marriage is barren, as it is said in these societies the love of sisters would forestall or at least help overcome the jealousies of polygyny. Since such sororal polygyny serves as a tension-reducing mechanism in the polygynous family and thereby helps to stabilise marriage.

These are but some of the institutions associated with patrilineal societies as already mentioned. They are more or less concerned with the continuity and numerical strength of the agnatic group. The important thing to remember is that they are institutionalised practices found in most of the anthropologically well known societies with agnatic lineages. In fact they are prevalent in so many societies that some anthropologists write as if these institutions are necessary features of patrilineal descent. It was this consideration that led Gluckman to put forward his controversial hypothesis on kinship structure and marital stability.⁹ It is sufficient to say here that there are

quite a number of patrilineal societies which differ radically from the Nuer-Zulu type of society in not having most of these institutions. In this regard the East African Kingdoms of the interlacustrine Bantu area provide ample examples. Among both the Ganda and the Soga marriages do not necessarily transfer all the woman's reproductive services to the husband. In all cases biological fatherhood is the sole basis for patrification. As such there is no room for woman marriage, marriage of an impotent man and ghost marriage. And among the Soga especially, Fallers has shown that wives are not absorbed into their husbands' lineages, that they still remain under the protection of their own patrilineal ancestors and lineage cults, even after marriage. In Anlo, the position is almost exactly the same. Married women remain members of their fathers' descent groups, and all cult affiliation they had before marriage are not affected by their marital status. Thus in matters affecting religious beliefs and affiliations as well as funerals, women are very closely attached to their lineage brothers. In Africa there seems to be a greater emphasis on kinship ties as opposed to affinal ties and this appears to hold whether we are considering those societies which incorporate wives into their husbands' descent groups and those which do not.

As already mentioned the main concern in the present exercise is to find out whether the Anlo have these institutions which are usually found in patrilineal societies of the Nuer-Zulu type. The presence or absence of these institutions will help interpret problems such as marital stability and the like. Nuer leave behind their wives and if the wives happen to have children with lovers during the absence of the husbands the Nuer would claim the child born to his wife; the Anlo husband would claim damages but not the child. Indeed the Anlo man would not only go on to seek divorce from the adultress, it is even considered dangerous for him to sleep with the wife after she has been seduced.

Also because of the primacy of biological fatherhood, woman-marriage and the related practices of an impotent man marrying for a pro-husband are absent. The sororate is never practised and there is a total taboo on sororal polygyny. Whereas the Zulu say that

the love of sisters would overcome the jealousies of co-wives, the Anlo say that the jealousies of co-wives would spoil the love of the sisters. This taboo on sororal polygyny in Anlo extends to all close cognates to such an extent that even sexual relations are prohibited between close affines.

These Anlo practices, I have mentioned, show how they differ in many respects from some of the better known patrilineal societies. It must be mentioned that the Anlo are essentially patrilineal and this is shown in many spheres of social activity. Clanship and lineage organisation have already been described. Patriliney is further evidenced in rules of succession, inheritance, ancestor worship, ward membership and the residence pattern. Residence especially exemplifies the agnatic principle because the local agnatic incidence for adults is over 75%. It has just been mentioned that succession, inheritance, ancestor worship and ward organisation are other fields of activity where the agnatic principle is brought into focus. We may however add immediately that in all these spheres of activity there is always a degree of laxity in the application of the patrilineal rule. Property usually passes from father to son but in case of land, rights of usufruct are extended to daughters also. Plots so inherited by women may be used by their own children and pass down to them after the death of their mothers.

Women's property such as trinkets, beads, clothing, ear-rings, pass to daughters. Succession to offices especially chiefship and lineage headship is strictly through the patrilineal line. Here we have a thorough application of the patrilineal principle because only agnates of the royal lineage can succeed to the chiefship, and only a member of a lineage can become its leader, but even here there are instances to show that where necessary sister's children are sometimes considered.¹²

Ancestorship is performed on lineage basis. The lineage head as the chief priest of the group performs the ancestral rites on behalf of the group. But the lineal descendants of the founder do not participate in the worship alone. All relatives of the lineage including all the cognatic descendants of the founding

ancestor are invited to participate. The belief is that the ancestors do make demands on both their lineal and cognatic descendants alike and both categories of kin can expect favours and punishments from them. This is closely related to their belief in reincarnation.¹³ Unlike many patrilineal societies which follow this belief, the dead among the Anlo are believed to return into the world not necessarily into their lineage but rather as members of their personal kindred or through both lineal and cognatic descendants, that is, a dead man is believed to come back into the world either into his own lineage group or into the family of any cognate.

Ward membership may be considered finally. Anlo settlements are usually divided into wards. The number of wards in any settlement depends on its ranging from two in the smallest to over ten in the larger towns. The ward organises the funerals of dead members and also acts as a dancing group. A person normally belongs to the ward of his father but this is not always the case. He can if he likes choose his mother's if the parents belong to different wards. The fact is that though every ward is territorially identified with a section of the settlement which the members occupy, to the Anlo themselves, it is participation in the ward's activities, not residence which determines to which ward a person belongs. A man whose parents belong to different wards, and who prefers for instance the songs of his mother's ward may choose that ward instead of the father's. Thus although the large majority belong to their father's wards it happens that a person could live with his lineage members in the ward and yet be counted as a member of another ward. It is also possible for two full brothers to belong to two different wards if one chooses the father's and the other the mother's.

We have tried to present with the help of the preceding examples, some aspects of the agnatic principle as applied to the Anlo. What has emerged is that Anlo social organisation is based on patrilineal descent with inheritance, succession and residence all following the patrilineal principle. But the system is not a rigid one. There are certain spheres of life where the lineal principle is lax enough to admit bilateral elements, as seen especially in inheritance and ancestor worship. Some institutions such as the sororate, soro-

ral polygyny, levirate, ghost-marriage and woman-marriage, which are essential features of some of the better known patrilineal societies are not present. In the words of Laura Bohannan we may say that marriage in Anlo transfers rights in uxorem but not rights in genetricem since the known genitor is in all cases the pater.¹⁴ In the same way in Anlo, "the principle of agnatic descent is not traced through the mother", as claimed by Evans-Pritchard. It is traced through the genitor. But the Anlo case is not unique. Examples of similar systems have already been mentioned and the importance of non-agnatic kinsfolk in patrilineal societies has also been emphasised in the works of Professor Fortes. In the case of rights involved in marriage the Anlo material provides another example to show divergence from what used to be regarded as the institutions usually found in patrilineal societies.

In the kinship system as a whole the Anlo material suggests that although descent groups can rightly be seen as the structures around which the social system is built, an individual's rights, obligations and privileges are not limited to these groups. In Anlo it appears an individual can turn with greater ease and confidence to cognatic relatives for help than in many patrilineal societies if agnates are not in a position to fulfil their lineage obligations.

Footnotes

1. A fuller account of the kinship system may be found in the author's Kinship and Marriage among the Anlo Ewe, London School of Economics monographs on Social Anthropology, No.37 London, Athlone Press, 1969.
2. See D. Westermann, Die Glidvi-Ewe in Togo, Berlin, 1935, p.160.
3. Jacob Spieth's works on the Ewe include Die Ewe Stamme, Berlin, 1906 and Die Religion der Eweer in Sud-Togo, Berlin, 1911.
4. The official list of the clans was given by the King's court at a durbar on 8th December, 1962 during the Anlo migration festival at Anloga. They were given in this order: Lafe, Amlade, Adzovia, Bate, Like, Bamee, Klevi, Tovi, Tsiamas, Agave, Ame, Dzevi, Uifeme, Yetsofe, and Blu.
5. See especially Westermann, 1935 *ibid*, B.E. Ward, The Social Organisation of the Ewe-speaking people, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of London 1949, p.71, M. Manoukian, The Ewe-speaking people of Togoland and the Gold Coast, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Western Africa, No.6 1952 p.22 and D.K. Fiawoo, The influence of contemporary social changes on the magico-religious concepts and organisation of the Southern Ewe-speaking peoples of Ghana, unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Edinburgh 1958 p.91
6. Examples are Fortes' The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi and "Descent, Filiation and Affinity" in Man, 1959, 309 and 331.
7. J. Middleton, Lugbara Religion, London 1960.
8. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer 1951 p.112.
9. M. Gluckman, "Kinship and Marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal" in A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde (eds.) African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, London 1950 pp.166-206.

10. See especially L.A. Fallers, "Some determinants of Marriage Stability in Busoga: A reformulation of Gluckman's hypothesis", in Africa 1957 p.106-121 and Martin Southwold, "The Ganda of Uganda" in J.L. Gibbs (ed.) Peoples of Africa, p.105.
11. op. cit. loc. cit.
12. Stool histories of many Anlo chiefdoms show that in the absence of suitable candidates in the male line, maternal relatives are considered for the chiefship.
13. Nukunva, op. cit. p.48.
14. Bohannan L. 1952 A Genealogical Charter. Africa XXII.



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